

VIII. QUICK UNILATERAL WITHDRAWAL OF ALL U.S. Forces

This course involves a U.S. decision (publicly announced, now or later) to withdraw all U.S. forces from SVN in one year ^{or two} or less, whether or not an agreement is reached in Paris.

A. Beliefs of Advocates

1. The war is unwinnable (in acceptable ways). No matter what statistics might indicate or official reporters feel, our efforts cannot resolve the political problems that are at the heart of this war. We should therefore cut our losses and avoid unknown additional risks while we can, and devote resources and energies to other activities elsewhere.

2. The ^{new} ~~Nixon~~ Administration can successfully explain this course to the American people and other nations, particularly in its early days.

3. The American people will be receptive because many are disenchanted with the war, and because many believe that domestic priorities would benefit. (Public opinion has responded favorably to deescalation and has favored escalation only "to get it over with." If no acceptable "get it over with" prospect is in sight, the public is likely to favor unilateral withdrawal.)

4. Other nations will accept our action because we have met our commitments by large investment in men and resources, and shown "wisdom" in accepting the situation.

5. It is important to start the withdrawal process now and complete it quickly because otherwise -- with every other option -- the new administration runs a risk of getting locked in (War transferred from Johnson to Nixon Administration rather than from U.S. to SVN).

6. The only way to get the SVN to try to negotiate a settlement with the NLF or to assume the burden of fighting is by credible announcement of actual full withdrawal.

7. Withdrawal "limits damage," saves lives, conserves resources now.

B. Military Actions

1. U.S. forces are drawn down to zero on a ~~crash~~ ^{with possible use of a MRAC} basis. (According to logistic estimates, this can be done in a year or less.)

2. U.S. immediately assumes posture suited for redeployment.
3. ~~Equipment turned over to GVN (as much as they are able to use).~~

C. Paris

1. U.S. tries to negotiate for reciprocal NVA withdrawal, using pace and scope of American withdrawal as bargaining counters (but U.S. withdraws in any case).

1. U.S. tries to get cease-fire during withdrawal.

3. U.S. maintains a strong declaratory policy against NVN (and other Communist) aggression and reaffirms U.S. interest in Asian nations willing to help themselves.

D. GVN

1. U.S. says it will continue to help present or other non-Communist forces as much as we can. Maintains a small force of technical advisers.
2. U.S. applies no pressure for reforms and is friendly to whatever GVN (or non-Communists in a coalition government) wants to do.

E. Cost

1. Fastest and surest way of reducing cost radically.
2. Fastest and surest way of reducing U.S. casualties.

F. Consequences

1. Probable collapse of GVN and Communist takeover, but possibility of non-Communist coalition government. (Even a Communist government after collapse not necessarily altogether Hanoi's "stooge.") SVN countryside quickly taken over by VC.

2. Initial concern on part of some Asian nations, but no domino process, ~~except for Laos.~~

a. Laos would probably go Communist quickly and Thais might hedge their ties with us, but would not be severely threatened.

I. MILITARY ESCALATION AIMED AT ~~NEGOTIATING~~ VICTORY

Expand military operations, including forces, into Cambodia and perhaps increased troop levels and resumption of bombing, aimed at obtaining withdrawal of all subversive forces with maintenance of current GVN in 1-2 years.

Beliefs of Advocates

1. Present allied efforts have the enemy on the ropes, but are not sufficient to knock him out. By applying additional pressure now, we can prevent him from recouping and make clear the great costs of continuing aggression.
2. This approach would require a greater U.S. effort in the short term, but will enable us to withdraw more safely in the mid- and longer-term.
3. Because any other alternative would lead, at best, to a confused situation, our allies will support us and U.S. public opinion will tolerate course.

Military Actions

1. Increase search and destroy operations aimed at seeking out and attriting the enemy.
2. Conduct operations in Cambodia and increase operations in Laos aimed at closing VC supply routes.
3. Perhaps resume bombing of 190, or on previous pattern, or more extensive bombing and mining of Haiphong.
4. Perhaps increase U.S. troop levels to 750,000 or one million.

Paris

1. Accept GVN lead on procedural matters.
2. Break off talks if Hanoi responds to U.S. expansion by violating the DMZ, attacking cities, or increasing infiltration.
3. Seek to negotiate withdrawal of all Communist forces from SVN with current GVN still in power.

GVN

1. Emphasize need for stability; support present government.
2. Urge but not demand reforms.

Cost

- increase over \$24 billion/year;*
1. Budget costs ~~remain at at least \$30 billion/year;~~ could go up to \$40 billion.
 2. Casualties increase to 300 or more per week.

Consequences

1. Some believe expansion will lead to victory in 6-12 months; others believe it will come in 2-5 years. On this view Hanoi should be willing to make major concessions when U.S. escalation becomes evident. Many in Group B doubt that any currently proposed or practically conceivable level of U.S. military pressure will defeat the enemy or destroy his will to the point where he is prepared to withdraw leaving the current GVN in power, unchallenged.
2. Further Americanization of the war.
3. Some danger of greatly increased war with larger participation by China or Russia.
4. Increased domestic opposition.

BASIC ISSUES

The key issues requiring judgment are:

1. Is the maintenance of non-Communist South Vietnam (under the present or a reformed GVN) of sufficient importance to the U.S. that we should be prepared to continue our current effort for the next 3 to 5 years, or an escalated effort for 1 to 3 years?
2. If not, can we and should we seek to involve ourselves through negotiations in the creation of a government based on some political compromise with the NLF?
3. If we wish to avoid imposing on the GVN and South Vietnam such a political compromise, could we negotiate with Hanoi the end of the phase of massive external military intervention which started in 1965? Could such arrangements with Hanoi be made without bringing about the collapse of the present GVN, but permit a mutual withdrawal of U.S. and NVA forces?
4. Given the success of our current military strategies, do we need to maintain current force levels (549,500 men in Vietnam) to continue present effectiveness, or can we maintain comparable fighting capability at a considerably lower troop level?
5. Should we in any case firmly commit ourselves, accepting the attendant risks, to a continuing withdrawal of U.S. forces over the next several years in order to reduce our own costs and to prod Saigon into negotiating with the NLF and meanwhile taking the necessary steps to increase its own political and military effectiveness?

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2. The Nixon Administration can successfully explain this course to the American people and other nations, particularly in its early days.
 - a. The American people will be receptive because many are disenchanted with the war, and because many believe that domestic priorities would benefit. (Public opinion has responded favorably to deescalation and has favored escalation only "to get it over with." If no acceptable "get it over with" prospect is in sight, the public is likely to favor unilateral withdrawal.)
 - b. Other nations will accept our action because we have met our commitments by large investment in men and resources, and shown "wisdom" in accepting the situation.
3. It is important to start the withdrawal process now and complete it quickly because otherwise -- with every other option -- the new administration runs a risk of getting locked in (War transferred from Johnson to Nixon Administration rather than from U.S. to SVN).
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7. The GVN and Political Evolution

The GVN seems to be more stable than at any time during the last four years. In the interests of replacing or counterbalancing Ky's influence (and perhaps under pressure of the onset of talks) Thieu has broadened his cabinet base to include more Southerners and some respected nationalists -- most notably, Premier Tran Van Huong. And he has backed Huong's drive to replace corrupt officials (with, by and large, Thieu supporters, though most seem to represent improvement). For the first time in years, representative institutions exist, at both national and local levels. These are moves, at last, in the right direction in the political struggle with the Communists.

Yet the coalescence of support for the GVN still mainly involves the more conservative, landowning or merchant groups, and the educated elites formerly close to the French administration. These elements, along with refugees from the North and GVN/ARVN officials with most to protect from Communist takeover, tend to be the most uncompromising anti-Communists. But it is questionable whether their leaders alone have either (a) the ability to mobilize the loyalties and efforts of enough of the non-Communist majority of the nation to confront effectively either the military or political efforts of the Communist apparatus, during or after hostilities, or (b) the will to talk directly with the NLF to seek any form of compromise settlement. In blunt terms: they do not engage either the trust or the self-interest (e.g., aspirations for social mobility or higher income) of the mass even of the non-Communist population; and they do not really want the war to end.

A further evolution of the government makeup and base of support, to include more non-Communist groups with organized rural roots like the various Hoa Hao and Cao Dai sects and the Montagnard "nationalists", and those with urban organization like the Buddhist associations, the Chinese and the unions, could serve both these purposes. Both are in U.S. interests. A broader GVN promises more

Vietnamese initiative towards ending the war. And greater cohesion of a broad range of non-Communist elements offers the only hope (a significant hope, if it can be achieved) of reducing the risk or even of postponing or cushioning an eventual Communist takeover if a compromise ends hostilities.

Yet one of the most unsuccessful aspects of our efforts has been getting the GVN to do virtually anything that it did not want to do, and it usually did not want to do anything that would in any serious way affect its own current distribution of power. We have gone to the GVN with small and large shopping lists for change and improvement. We have applied pressure and we have been kind and gentle. No combination of these tactics has proven successful. GVN tactics have been to resist us for a while, then when some pressure is applied, to agree in principle, and then to take little or no action. One explanation for the GVN's unresponsiveness is probably its belief that we would not invoke sanctions against them. If this has been their judgment, it has proven correct. The argument is invariably made, and there is undoubtedly truth to it, that we should not judge them by our standards or expect too much of them. This wise judgment, however, has been used to justify U.S. inaction rather than action with judiciousness.

8. The Domino Theory

Ever since the early 1950s U.S. policy has been based on the domino theory, either tacitly or explicitly. After a great deal of waffling and argumentation, the intelligence community has finally come to the judgment that the domino theory has very little validity under current circumstances, and that even with an adverse outcome in Vietnam the fate of Southeast Asia will be determined much more by what the countries of this region themselves do in their own behalf than on a communist threat per se. NIE 1-68 of 6 June 1968 states the position:

"29. Assuming a negotiation in Vietnam which leaves the Communist apparatus and the non-Communist political forces intact but no longer in active combat, the situation in Vietnam and Laos would probably be indecisive for some time. Subversion in Cambodia and Thailand would continue, but could probably be contained. Elsewhere in Southeast Asia -- in Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines -- governments would confront the continuing and intractable problems of economic development and of nation-building; these would provide issues and situations susceptible of exploitation by forces wishing to unseat or subvert the existing regimes. By and large, the governments would probably get the better of it. Even if Vietnam fell fairly soon into the hands of a regime dominated by the Communists, the other regimes would probably not collapse, but their struggle for existence would become more intense and their survival more precarious. They have assets South Vietnam has never had, namely, relative peace, some sense of nationhood, and real successes against Communist subversion."

NIE 50-68 of 14 November 1968 develops this thesis more fully. Confirming the anti-domino judgment with respect to Vietnam, this NIE argues that it is Laos (once again!) rather than Vietnam which will have a much greater impact on the future of the area.

VII. WITHDRAWAL OF ALL U.S. FORCES IN 2-3 YEARS

Firm public commitment to withdraw all U.S. forces from SVN in 2-3 years and deescalate its operations in the South whether or not a settlement is reached.

Beliefs of advocates

1. U.S. domestic priorities require U.S. commitment to be entirely out of SVN in a fixed time.
2. Withdrawal in 6-12 months would cause collapse of GVN while withdrawal over 2-3 years will give ARVN time to take over responsibility for fighting.
3. U.S. commitment will be met by continuing U.S. involvement for another 2-3 years while providing aid to GVN; communist SVN not intolerable.

Military

1. U.S. forces could be withdrawn at rate of 200,000 a year with all forces withdrawn by end of 1971 at latest.
2. As U.S. forces withdraw the U.S. military effort would be contracted and finally limited to defense of U.S. bases.

Paris Negotiations

1. ~~Press energetically~~ ^{Aim at} for mutual withdrawal with or without a political settlement.
- 2/ Recognize that U.S. commitment to total withdrawal substantially reduces U.S. leverage.

GVN

1. Make clear to GVN that U.S. fully intends to be out in 2-3 years.
2. Provide ARVN with all of equipment it can use.
3. Urge GVN to reform but do not threaten to cut off aid.

Costs

1. Financial cost reduced from \$24 billion now to \$7 billion by FY 1972 assuming complete withdrawal of U.S. forces (including air forces) and deescalation.
2. Casualties decline in proportion to troop withdrawal.

Consequences

1. If Hanoi steps up its efforts Communists could control much of SVN before U.S. withdraws.
2. Unless Hanoi withdraws Communist takeover likely after U.S. withdrawal. VC may be able to defeat ARVN even if Hanoi withdraws.
3. If Hanoi withdraws in response could lead to defacto-mutual withdrawal.
4. Paris settlement on favorable terms (for U.S.) very unlikely.
5. Outcome will depend on whether GVN/ARVN pulls itself together, collapses, or negotiates with NLF.
6. Public commitment to this option would strongly reduce incentives to DRV to come to agreement on mutual withdrawal or a political settlement, or to withdraw its forces at all. Thus, this option is likely to seem preferable to IV or V mainly if chances of such explicit or tacit agreements seem very low (e.g., after some months of substantive discussions in Paris had been totally discouraging).
7. Enemy morale goes up.

6

him to provide the men and materiel he needs at a lower cost. It does not necessarily result in a big increase in infiltration. It is interesting to note that the VC/NVA combat strength has been maintained at about 120,000 (+ or - 5%) for over two years, despite sharply increasing casualties and a growing and changing U.S. interdiction effort. This indicates careful long-range planning on the part of Hanoi.

The juxtaposition of two additional facts are revealing. First, ever since we began ROLLING THUNDER in early 1965, enemy infiltration has increased as U.S. bombings increased. Second, now that we have ceased our bombings in all of North Vietnam and bomb only in Laos, the enemy has significantly curtailed his infiltration into South Vietnam. He has gone from a post-Tet high of about 33,000 per month to a present figure of about 7,000 per month. (This is a very soft figure.) This latter figure could indicate that he is abiding by the implicit understanding of keeping infiltration at about fall of 1967 levels. This understanding on infiltration is of such a tenuous nature that Hanoi could feel free to step up the pace at any time. One could infer from present levels that Hanoi is trying to coordinate infiltration with a forthcoming negotiating strategy. It could also mean that, because he has taken high losses in South Vietnam including significant losses in combat leadership, he is not prepared to take comparable losses over the long-run while following a negotiating strategy.

The economic price or "strain" imposed on the North was substantial but not critical. The small, modern NVN industrial sector was made largely inoperable, but essential needs for manufactures were met by a stream of military and economic goods imported from the USSR and Communist China, rising to some \$1-billion-worth a year. Civilian casualties were small -- and kept by us as small as we reasonably could. NVN manpower needs were met by the natural increase in the working population and diversion from the normally under-employed agricultural work force, with substitution of women for men in many jobs.

6. Pacification

Called by any name -- the "other war" or "revolutionary development" -- pacification is perhaps the most difficult area to evaluate in Vietnam. More than any other aspect of the war, we have continually over-estimated the degree to which the countryside was "pacified." The question is not which side has "more" control, access, sympathy or support in a given area. The key test is whether VC guerrillas can get what they need, to survive, expand and operate, in areas unoccupied by friendly regular forces. In most places, they can. A key indicator of rural security is whether a GVN official can stay at night in his hamlet or village. By and large, away from district and province towns (except for certain religious sect areas), he cannot.

A current "Accelerated Pacification Program" is expanding GVN presence, in the form of militia detachments, in contested hamlets: a useful precursor to a possible ceasefire, but no real basis for improvement in rural security. The program includes a crash effort to "neutralize" VC Infrastructure (VCI), but it is still unclear just how this is interpreted by field officials: other than as assassination or arrest of persons moving at night or found on local, highly-padded lists of "unverified" VCI. That many hard-core Communist cadre or higher-level officials (as distinct from draft dodgers, persons lacking ID cards, personal enemies of local authorities, members of village "people's organizations," coerced laborers for the VC, or more usefully, couriers) will be eliminated, or the Communist apparatus significantly damaged, by such a program is very doubtful.

Crash drives by "amateur police" can produce, on schedule, reports of success, but are no substitute for the patient, coordinated, professional police/intelligence effort against the Communist subversive apparatus that has never been mounted in Vietnam and that must be at the heart of an effective counterinsurgency campaign. Coordination of intelligence for such an effort is just now, at last, beginning, still mainly on the U.S. side, and it cannot be assumed that it will spread to the GVN effort.

In sum, we still cannot be confident that our South Vietnamese allies, or ourselves, know how to pacify, or can come to do what it takes.

8. Danger of Emphasis on Laos

USG evaluations have apparently converged on the notion that after a U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, Laos would be of key importance for Southeast Asia. In particular, the "domino" effect is said to hinge largely on the fate of Laos. Hence, it is argued that for an agreed mutual withdrawal from Vietnam, the United States should insist on an agreement for Laos that would lead to a reduction of or at least prohibit an increase in NVA forces.

Three questions should be raised regarding this emphasis on Laos:

- (1) Is confidence in this evaluation warranted? How likely is it that other "dominos" would fall if non-Communist Laos were taken over by the Pathet Lao with NVA help? Specifically, how would the defenses of Thailand be affected? How much direct aid are the North Vietnamese likely to give to Thai insurgents if NVN controlled Laos? Could the Thai Government cope with that challenge?
- (2) What are the likely costs if, in negotiations for mutual withdrawal, the United States insists that NVA should agree to keep out of Laos (or not to penetrate more)? Assuming we succeed in obtaining such a DRV agreement, will we have to give in on some other points in the overall withdrawal agreement? Or to put it differently, how much in terms of diplomatic concessions is such an agreement worth? Specifically, if the DRV refuses the Laos deal, should the United States switch to Alternative 1 or 2?
- (3) After mutual U.S.-NVA withdrawal from Vietnam is completed, what can we do to deter a violation of such a Laos agreement? Might U.S. reaction to (or preparations for) a violation of the new Laos agreement result in new U.S. commitments to defend Laos?

Option 4-D8. DANGER OF EMPHASIS ON LAOS (lower case)

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- ⑥:
- (1) Patiently moves
 - (2) What to say to press about some
 - (3) keep cool - not not about
 - (4) confer background of
 - (5) SN - summaries studies
 - (6) I to go over...
 - (7) Security issue
- (I role in new org?)

Relations with G has improved

As Nixon says, I will not speculate
on that...

but as like X, I want ask the
press not to speculate

25 Nov 30 Nov - 15

1972

Sat:

Sagon 1440

1445

Give Rogers' paper to Muehr
this afternoon.

